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University of Chester

Department of English

MA Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture

Dissertation

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**Materialising Meaning:
Samuel Taylor Coleridge
and George Eliot**



Abstract

George Eliot's response to Romantic ideology is critically established. While most scholarship recognises the influence of William Wordsworth on her prose fiction, the affinities between Eliot's prose and the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge remain relatively unexplored. A wealth of criticism has established Coleridge's importance to nineteenth-century philosophical and religious thought, as well as to aesthetic discourse; critical discussion of his poetic influence is usually linked with contemporary and later poets. He is, however, often invoked as a major influence on Eliot's intellectual development.

Evidence of Coleridge's direct influence on Eliot's fiction is difficult to substantiate; this study offers readings that diverge from previous analyses by foregrounding Eliot's engagement with Coleridge's language. Focus on the language used by Coleridge and Eliot reveals thematic and linguistic similarities, as well as convergences in their use of metaphor and symbolism. Where divergences exist, they are examined with the objective of establishing a development or progression in the way ideas and concepts are expressed in Eliot's fiction. The nature of this progression is analysed in terms of Eliot's increased preoccupation with materiality.

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Introduction: A Strange, Striking Thing

In Book First, Chapter V, of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Arthur Donnithorne presents a copy of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* to his godmother, Mrs Irwine:

“I know you are fond of queer, wizard-like stories. It's a volume of poems, ‘Lyrical Ballads.’ most of them seem to be twaddling stuff; but the first is in a different style – ‘The Ancient Mariner’ is the title. I can hardly make head or tail of it as a story, but it's a strange, striking thing.”¹

I was intrigued by Coleridge's presence in Eliot's novel, and by Donnithorne's comments.

The themes of *Adam Bede* seemed strikingly similar to Coleridge's preoccupations in ‘The Ancient Mariner’: acts and their consequences; suffering and loss; sin and expiation.

Donnithorne's assertion that he cannot ‘make head or tail of it as a story’ elegantly summarises his inability to perceive the consequences of his actions. Wordsworth's influence on Eliot as an author is well-established, but preliminary investigations revealed the absence of any equivalent body of criticism detailing a Coleridgean influence on Eliot's fiction.

Aware that the field of literary influence is a highly contentious one, my initial research aimed to establish robust links between Coleridge and Eliot. I found that, where connections exist, they are tenuous and inconclusive. Biographical investigations reveal Eliot's second-hand familiarity with Coleridge as an individual, through her connections with the Hennells and Brays in Coventry.² Discussion of Coleridge's general influence in the

¹ George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 59-60. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

² Coleridge's correspondent Dr R. H. Brabant of Devizes had links with Eliot's social circle during her time at Foleshill. The Brabant children were interconnected by marriage with the Hennells and the Brays, all of whom were influential in Eliot's (Marian Evans at that time) intellectual development. Elizabeth ‘Rufa’ Hennell, Eliot's friend and Brabant's daughter, had been given her nickname by Coleridge. Brabant introduced Elizabeth's husband Charles Hennell's *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838) to David Strauss, who translated it into German in 1839. It was Charles Hennell's sister, Sara, who asked Eliot to take on the translation of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, published in 1846. Coleridge had dictated his ‘Evidences of Christianity’ to Brabant in 1815; in this work, he details the separation, as he perceives it, of the ‘MIRACLES’ from the ‘material’ and ‘doctrines’ of Christianity (*The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. H. N. Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1836), Volume 1, p. 386).

nineteenth century tends to bifurcate; one branch of criticism focuses on his influence as a philosopher and theologian, and the other on his identity and body of work as a Romantic poet and literary theorist. He was an important - some writers claim *the* important - British exponent of Kant's philosophy.³ Valerie A. Dodd cites the 'profound implications' of Coleridge's work for later writers, including Eliot; she refers to Eliot 'reading Coleridge in 1841 at Foleshill', and argues that Eliot 'followed in the footsteps of Coleridge and Carlyle [as a] propagandist for German scholarship.'⁴ Other critics link Coleridge and Eliot as popularisers of German thought; most do not make Dodd's direct connections, but characterise Coleridge's influence as 'diffusive rather than direct'.⁵

David Carroll argues that Eliot's 'career and fiction can best be understood in the context of nineteenth-century hermeneutics', and identifies Coleridge as one of the originators of that 'philosophical tradition'.⁶ E. S. Shaffer locates both Coleridge and Eliot within the tradition of biblical criticism, tracing a progression over time from 'the Biblical criticism of Coleridge's youth [to the] medium of secular religious experience [of Eliot's time]'.⁷ Connections made by these critics are concerned primarily, then, with influences shared by Coleridge and Eliot, rather than with direct influence. Other thinkers are presented as equally, or more, influential on Eliot's thinking; Carlyle, Rousseau, Strauss, Hennell, Feuerbach,

³ Rosemary Ashton, for example, calls Coleridge 'undoubtedly the most important interpreter of Kant'. (*The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought 1800-1860* (London: Libris, 1994), p. 25).

⁴ Valerie A. Dodd, *George Eliot: An Intellectual Life* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 11, 6, 156. I have been unable to substantiate these references, or any of Dodd's assertions concerning Coleridge's 'influence' on Eliot, purportedly based on letters written by Eliot to Maria Lewis in 1841 (Dodd, p. 81).

⁵ Ashton, *The German Idea*, p. 2.

⁶ David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Reading of the Novels* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 3-4.

⁷ E. S. Shaffer, *'Kubla Khan' and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), p. 4.

Comte, Goethe, and George Henry Lewes are all claimed to have contributed equally to her intellectual development over time.

The second area of existing scholarship addresses Coleridge's influence as a Romantic poet and critic. K. M. Newton classifies Eliot as 'an advanced or later Romantic writer', and Tim Dolin enumerates the qualities in her writing that he believes make Eliot 'a Romantic'.⁸ Most critics, when they refer to Romantic elements in Eliot's thought and fiction, focus on the influence of Wordsworth: '[w]ithout Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, and his celebrated 1802 Preface to them, Eliot's realism could hardly have been imagined', claims Dolin.⁹ Coleridge seems to have been elided as Wordsworth's co-author here. M. H. Abrams and U. C. Knoepfelmacher are among many critics who refer to Eliot as 'Wordsworthian', and trace Wordsworth's influence on her fiction.¹⁰ When Knoepfelmacher discusses Coleridge in relation to Eliot's fiction, it is primarily to link her with Milton and with Wordsworth, who is 'deliberately woven into the fabric of [*Adam Bede*]'.¹¹ Knoepfelmacher does discuss the influence of 'The Ancient Mariner' on *Adam Bede*; he likens Hetty's description of her baby as 'a heavy weight hanging around my neck' (p. 406) to the albatross around the Mariner's neck, and notes that Hetty, like the Mariner and Wordsworth's Martha Ray in 'The Thorn', is 'forced to enact an exemplary role'.¹²

Knoepfelmacher's identification of correlative imagery in 'The Ancient Mariner' and *Adam Bede* is persuasive, but not sufficiently compelling to support an argument for Coleridge's influence on Eliot's fiction. The generality and oblique nature of existing critical

⁸ K. M. Newton, *George Eliot, Romantic Humanist: A Study of the Philosophical Structure of Her Novels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 3, 33; Tim Dolin, *George Eliot* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 88.

⁹ Dolin, *George Eliot*, p. 89.

¹⁰ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 83; U. C. Knoepfelmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) p. 17.

¹¹ Knoepfelmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels*, p. 93.

¹² Knoepfelmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels*, p. 95.

commentary on Coleridge in relation to Eliot makes unequivocal assertions about influence problematic, in an area already replete with problematic elements.¹³ However, fascinating correspondences in the language used by Coleridge and Eliot reveal thematic similarities and other areas of convergence in perception and presentation. Eliot writes, in *Adam Bede*: '[s]he couldn't understand the sorrow; but, for these moments, under the subduing influence of Dinah's spirit, she felt that she must be patient and still' (p. 104). Her language and phrasing here are uncannily similar to Coleridge's in 'Dejection: An Ode':

But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient, all I can.¹⁴

Both quotations discuss the power of the spirit, but instead of Coleridge's 'shaping spirit', Eliot has 'subduing [...] spirit'. Within this convergence at the level of language, there is a radical divergence in meaning. Coleridge's imagination, his shaping spirit, is presented as something both integral to his sense of self and beyond his control. The prevailing tone is one of disempowerment: he lacks the agency to enact the desired re-engagement with his shaping spirit, and his stillness and patience are manifestations of his passivity. Dinah's spirit, conversely, subdues, or attenuates, Lisbeth's emotional pain; Eliot describes this process as 'influence'. The spirit is a faculty, subject to Dinah's agency, which she exercises through an act of will, to comfort Lisbeth. It can be used, as it is here, as an instrument to affect and condition human interaction.

¹³ Harold Bloom's concept of 'hidden roads that go from poem to poem', for instance, is problematized by its embeddedness in Bloom's complex and arcane theories of influence, thorough examination of which is prevented here by lack of space (*The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edition (Oxford: OUP, 1997), p. 96).

¹⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Dejection: An Ode', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (London: Penguin (Penguin Classics), 1997), pp. 307-311, ll. 84-8. All further references will be given in the body of the text. All further references to Coleridge's poetry will use this edition, unless otherwise indicated.

This comparison foregrounds both convergences in language use and divergences in meaning in Coleridge's poetry and Eliot's fiction. The surprisingly high incidence of similar textual correspondences reveals a number of thematic and philosophical parallels pervading the work of both writers; it also highlights a number of areas in which they diverge consistently. Coleridge's work presents, in many instances, an inability to escape the restrictions of subjectivity; this results in passivity, lack of agency, fragmentation, and reinforced isolation. By depicting the same, or similar, human propensities in the context of interaction with others, Eliot presents a manifesto for the sympathy which empowers an individual to effect good in the world. For Coleridge, power is located in the apprehension of a reconciled self; when this is realised, it enables access to a magnifying union with nature and the divine, but when it is withheld, it diminishes perceptions of the self and the world to an almost unbearable degree.

Textual parallels can be used to interrogate divergences in attitudes to philosophical ideas; Kant's philosophy, familiar to both Coleridge and Eliot, is a good example, and is used in the following discussions to elucidate their differing conceptions of a priori categories, moral responsibility and action, and the nature of self in the world. The nature of divergence between Coleridge and Eliot can be characterised as a progression towards a greater materiality of expression in Eliot. Her fiction demonstrates a realisation or reification of ideology through practical interactions between characters; Dinah comforts Lisbeth, Dorothea does her duty, Silas is redeemed by love and community. It is this materiality that is alluded to in my title: the convergences in language that are, simultaneously, divergences in outlook illustrate a progression in the ideas expressed, a development of meaning that I refer to as 'materialisation'. The meanings rendered by Coleridge's language are materialised, made tangible and practical, in the transition from their manifestations in his poetry to their manifestations, often in the same language, in Eliot's fiction.

Chapter One

Self and the World: Affliction, Inspiration, and Duality

There are close correspondences in the way that Coleridge and Eliot depict the pain of grief and loss; these occur at the level of language, as well as thematically. The state of mourning for a lost aspect of the self expressed in Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' is mirrored in descriptions of mourning in the account of Dinah's visit to comfort Lisbeth in *Adam Bede*. Thematic links concerning the nature of affliction, lack of agency, and the defamiliarising effects of grief are reflected in the language used to describe these conditions. Sustained discourse on the location, experience and origin of inspiration informs Coleridge's poem and Eliot's descriptions of character. Clear parallels can be drawn between Coleridge's conception of the soul's 'voice' and power, and the personal presence and influence of Dinah, and fascinating correspondences between the portrayals of imagination in Coleridge and sympathy in Eliot point to shared perceptions, as well as areas of divergence. Although one of these points of divergence is their differing responses to Kantian philosophy, a close examination of the language used to address the issues of imagination and sympathy reveals surprising convergences as well.

In 'Dejection', Coleridge presents his emotions through description of a natural world that expresses for him the agony of 'grief without a pang, void, dark and drear' (l. 21).¹⁵ The wind's 'dull sobbing draft' 'moans and rakes' (l. 6), frustrating Coleridge's desire for a

¹⁵ Whilst the identity of the speaker in poems is invariably a subject of contention, in the case of 'Dejection' it can be asserted that the emotions presented are Coleridge's own. This is largely due to the history of the poem; originally conceived as 'A Letter to ----- / April 4, 1802. -- Sunday Evening', it was, in its initial form, an appeal to Sara Hutchinson for emotional comfort and the reciprocation of Coleridge's sexual and romantic passion. The much-revised poem was subsequently published in *The Morning Post*, 4 October, 1802, and then in the 1817 *Sybilline Leaves* and subsequent collections of Coleridge's poetry. The many revisions of the poem, including changes in the name of the addressee, present a fascinating study in the reframing of intimate emotions for a public audience.

mighty storm that will inspire his awe and ‘startle [his] dull pain’ into a response that will ‘move and live’ (l. 20). The sense of disempowerment expressed by Coleridge conveys his emotional disposition as subject to external elements, although he manipulates depiction of these in order to emphasise his feelings of powerlessness. By framing his emotional state as responsive to, rather than acting upon, his environment, he presents his ‘stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief’ (l. 22) as a ‘visitation’ (l. 84), over which he has no control.

This sense of subjection – even abjection – is echoed by Eliot’s description of the ‘overwhelming sense of pain’ experienced by Lisbeth on the death of her husband (p. 100). Lisbeth’s suffering, like Coleridge’s, is described as an ‘affliction’ (p. 100). Lisbeth breaks into ‘moans’ (p. 96), throws her apron over her head, and sways on her chair, ‘giving a low moan with every forward movement of her body’ (p. 99). Just as the ‘dull sobbing draft’ (l. 6) plays upon the strings of Coleridge’s ‘Eolian lute’ (l. 7), Lisbeth’s abjection is expressed in the air expelled from her body in moans. The image of being played upon by external forces that Coleridge encapsulates in the metaphor of the Eolian lute, is echoed in the image of Lisbeth’s body, whose moans are ‘played’ by the uncontrollable physical convulsions of her grief. Describing the way in which ‘grief in its freshness feels the need of associating its loss and its lament with every change of scene and incident’ (p. 98), Eliot further echoes Coleridge’s portrayal of his loss through its associations with the external world in the first stanza of ‘Dejection’.

Although Lisbeth’s outburst of ‘passion’ (p. 96) contrasts with Coleridge’s ‘unimpassioned’ grief, Eliot’s description of the ‘blank eyes’ with which Lisbeth surveys the ‘dirt and confusion’ (p. 95) of her kitchen parallels the grief described by Coleridge, who gazes at the western sky ‘with how blank an eye’ (l. 30). The sense that profound grief can rob the sufferer of both recognition of, and emotional response to, external circumstances informs both descriptions. It is notable that both Coleridge and Eliot depict the grief of loss in

a similarly contradictory way; both note the associations with the external world that stimulate and in some way manifest the grief for the griever, but both also observe the detachment with which the griever responds to external stimuli. The defamiliarising effects of grief so overwhelm the perceptions as to make the things of everyday life, whether a western sky or a disorganised kitchen, alien and distant, and the usual responses to them unobtainable.

Eliot emphasises this process of defamiliarisation through the elaborate simile of the griever, as ‘one who has been deposited sleeping among the ruins of a vast city’, and who, on waking ‘in dreary amazement’, cannot make sense of the ‘desolation’ of his surroundings or of himself (p. 95). Not only does this mirror Coleridge’s ‘dark and drear’ (l. 21) grief, there is also an element of the uncanny in Eliot’s depiction of displacement; everything is transfigured, strange, and profoundly disturbing. The western sky, on which Coleridge has been gazing blankly, is similarly transfigured, with its ‘peculiar tint of yellow green’ (l. 29). The unnatural colour of the sky is ominous because it is alien; the alienation experienced by the gazer is expressed in Coleridge’s division between seeing and feeling, or responding to, the object of visual scrutiny: ‘I see, not feel’ (l. 38). Here, Coleridge is referring to the emerging stars above him, but the lack of connection, of seeing but not feeling ‘how beautiful they are’ (l. 38), is coloured by the defamiliarising effects of grief in a manner echoing the way that the night sky is made strange by its uncanny colour.

Similarly uncanny properties inform Eliot’s description, in a previous chapter, of the meditative state in which Dinah receives divine inspiration, or ‘direction’ (p. 73). Dinah is insensible to her physical surroundings when in this state; as Mrs Poyser observes, she becomes like a statue, ‘a-starin’ and a-smilin’ whether it’s fair weather or foul’ (p. 73). Coleridge also stares, or gazes, at the western sky ‘[a]ll this long eve’ (l. 27), even though he accepts eventually the futility looking outwards for inspiration. This attitude of staring at, but not engaging with, physical surroundings renders both figures uncanny. Dinah’s outward stare

is the manifestation of all-consuming internal, mental processes; she is either a life-like statue, disturbing the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, or a persistently staring and smiling person, whose inexplicable attitude disturbs the boundaries between sanity and insanity. The impression of non-human status ascribed to Dinah is reinforced when Lisbeth thinks, on hearing her voice and then seeing her face, first that she is the spirit of her dead sister, and then, perhaps, an angel (p. 99).

Coleridge's persistent gaze manifests in a similar way his preoccupation with internal processes – or with his lack of access to them. His unusually prolonged gazing at the 'green light that lingers in the west' (l. 44) links the unnatural colour of the sky with his actions, placing him on the borders of irrationality. But Coleridge's staring is not merely *unheimlich*; his sense of estrangement in his surroundings also speaks of a more profound disconnection. The division between sensory perceptions and the capacity for understanding and interpreting them, as formulated by Kant, is discussed in more detail below; Coleridge's familiarity with Kant suggests that his description of seeing but not feeling may allude to a schism at the most basic level of human response. As Coleridge puts it: '[b]y experience only I know, that I have eyes; but then my reason convinces me, that I must have had eyes in order to have the experience.'¹⁶ Is this inability to respond feelingly a separation from the understanding that contextualises and informs empirical evidence, as well as severance from the capacity for inspiration? The stasis linking Coleridge with Dinah indicates their inability to move outwards and engage, in Coleridge's case, with his inspiration, but in Dinah's, with other people and the natural processes going on around her. Both experience a schism, a radical

¹⁶ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, eds James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press (Bollingen Series LXXV), 1984), vol. I, Ch. 12, p. 293.

lack of connectedness, whose nature reflects the divergence between Coleridge's preoccupation with subjective experience, and Eliot's with material interaction.

Both Coleridge and Eliot present the experience of inspiration as an internalised process, something taken inwards from outside, like breath. Both use similar language to describe this process, but also differentiate between the experience of inspiration and its source. Coleridge's meditative gaze culminates in the conclusion that 'I may not hope from outward forms to win / The passion and the life, whose fountains are within' (ll. 45-6). The forms of the outward world are insufficient to start, or 'startle', his imaginative powers into life; he locates within himself that desperately sought-for, passionate engagement with his creativity. Paradoxically, he seeks self-estrangement, the shock of transformed perceptions of the world, to startle him into engagement, as an engine requires the spark of ignition for transmission to occur, but the outward spark is unobtainable. His language and phrasing here recall biblical language describing Christ as 'the resurrection and the life', and His suffering as passion.¹⁷ Biblical allusions like these contain implications of the original divine source, for Coleridge, of all creativity. It is apposite that he should describe his desire to re-engage with his creative imagination by allusion to John 11, in which Christ resurrects Lazarus from the dead; Coleridge's separation from his capacity to experience inspiration is like death to him, and reinstatement of his imaginative faculties would represent a restoration to life. David Jasper observes that 'the key to Coleridge's particular understanding [of the divine] is his celebrated definition of the primary Imagination':¹⁸

The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.¹⁹

¹⁷ John 11:25, King James version.

¹⁸ David Jasper, *The Sacred and Secular Canon in Romanticism: Preserving the Sacred Truths* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 30.

¹⁹ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. I, Ch. 13, p. 304.

Coleridge presents the primary imagination as the 'prime Agent', the most important shaping force in 'all human Perception'. The word 'Agent' implies the active nature of the primary imagination; it mediates between 'the finite mind', limited by physical existence, and 'the infinite I AM', or the infinite source of consciousness, God.²⁰ Coleridge identifies the primary imagination as a 'living Power', a vital quality inherent in human perception, which enables 'a repetition', or reflection, in the finite terms of human consciousness, of 'the eternal act of creation', or the infinite nature of God. Therefore, when Coleridge locates the 'fountains' of inspiration within himself, he is not asserting Christ-like status or power, but attempting to describe the mystical experience of union with the Infinite I AM, and its effects upon the conscious mind. It is the loss of this connection that informs the emotional suffering expressed in 'Dejection'.

The language used by Eliot to describe Dinah's experience of divine direction is remarkably similar to that used by Coleridge to convey the way in which he experiences inspiration. Coleridge's 'fountains' are analogous with Dinah's description of 'the thought of God overflowing [her] soul': 'For thoughts are so great', she observes, 'They seem to lie upon us like a deep flood' (p. 82). The overwhelming effect of inspiration / direction on the conscious mind is implicit in this watery imagery; the force of Coleridge's fountains and the magnitude of Dinah's flood both imply the impossibility of containing or controlling their experiences. Both evoke biblical language: these descriptions recall the original act of inspiration described in Genesis, when 'the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the

²⁰ The 'infinite I AM' refers to the passage in Exodus describing the revelation of God to Moses: 'I AM THAT I AM'. Exodus 3: 14, King James version.

waters'.²¹ As well as reinforcing the religious nature of their imagery, this suggests a common source for some of the descriptive language used by Coleridge and Eliot.

Eliot's depiction of the character of Dinah corresponds closely to Coleridge's descriptions of 'the soul' in stanza IV, and of the 'pure of heart' in stanza V of 'Dejection'. Coleridge's assertion that 'we receive but what we give' (l. 47) is reflected in Dinah's selflessness. She states that 'I seem to have no room in my soul for wants and fears of my own, it has pleased God to fill my heart so full of the wants and sufferings of his poor people' (p. 33). For Coleridge, only 'the soul' (l.53) can restore anything 'of higher worth' (l. 50) to 'the poor, loveless, ever-anxious crowd' (l. 52). Dinah is depicted by Eliot as that ideal soul, who, in language startlingly similar to Coleridge's, brings comfort to 'poor, aged, fretful Lisbeth' (p. 104). The similarity of these three-adjective phrases illustrates the contrast between Eliot's concrete, specific employment of such language and its general, oblique use in Coleridge. The transition from the 'crowd' in Coleridge to the character of Lisbeth personalises the expression by fixing it in description of an individual. Furthermore, the difference between 'loveless' to 'ageing' foregrounds Eliot's preoccupation with organic, material processes. The 'sweet and potent voice' (l. 57) of the soul is mirrored in 'the soothing influence of Dinah's face and voice' (p. 104) on Lisbeth. The 'voice' in Coleridge is represented as an individual voice in Eliot, in a process of definition that materialises the transcendent concept in the terms of human action and interaction. The 'power' (l.63) attributed by Coleridge to 'that voice' (l. 74) corresponds closely to Eliot's delineation of the power of Dinah's influence on those around her. Human, tangible, interactive influence, rather than the internalised, conceptual power of the non-material characterises Eliot's presentation – or re-presentation – of 'voice'. The 'Joy' (ll. 64, 66, 70) that for Coleridge

²¹ Genesis 1: 2, King James version.

emanates from, and characterises, the ‘strong music in the soul’ (l. 60) is reflected, in Eliot, in ‘the joy of being with Dinah’, which ‘*would* triumph: it was like the influence of climate, which no resistance can overcome’ (p. 101).

It is striking that both of these sentiments concerning joy, and its power, are attributable to feelings of romantic love: Coleridge’s for the original addressee of ‘Dejection’, and Seth’s for Dinah. Both women evoke admiration, even adoration, which inspires transcendent thought and expression. Seth believes Dinah to be ‘greater and better than himself’ (p. 34); Eliot’s narrator comments that ‘[l]ove of this sort is hardly distinguishable from religious feeling’ (p. 34). For Coleridge, the ‘Joy’ experienced by the beloved, whose virtue, purity and humility render it innate in her, also has religious dimensions. The characteristics of ‘Joy’ – a ‘light’, a ‘glory’, a ‘fair luminous cloud / mist’ (ll. 54 and 62) are redolent of depictions of saints. For Eliot, saintliness is commensurate with selflessness like Dinah’s, and for her the selfless act, in a succinct refraction of Coleridge’s more nebulous characterisation, ‘has a beneficent radiation that is not lost’ (p. 35). Eliot’s narrative comments on selflessness diverge slightly from Coleridge’s; it is the act, rather than the actor, that is the agent of the soul’s magnification, and this divergence is a further example of the representation of the concept in more tangible, material terms. The diffusive power, or ‘radiation’, that Eliot attributes to the act, however, expands it beyond the material fact of its occurrence, and attributes to it characteristics more akin to the ‘suffusion’ perceived by Coleridge (l. 75).

Tragically, all of Coleridge’s assertions in ‘Dejection’ concerning joy and its uplifting power are equivocal and conditional, because he cannot hear his soul’s music, despite his repeated, projected ‘we’. He presents his addressee as the ideal, who may be able to mediate this ‘voice’ by possessing the qualities necessary to attain ‘the spirit and the power, / Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower’ (ll. 67-8). That mediation is necessary, because his own

ability to apprehend ‘the spirit and the power’ is incomplete, fractured by the suspension of ‘what nature gave me at my birth, / My shaping spirit of Imagination’ (ll. 85-6).

The way in which Coleridge experiences inspiration as a conscious response to apprehension of the infinite identifies that response as an inner process, as discussed above; but the source of his inspiration, the force that is the wellspring of those inner fountains, lies outside his consciousness. The idea that ‘nature’ bestows upon humanity the capacity for receiving inspiration proposes an external source for this capacity; the primary imagination is, for Coleridge, the necessary faculty for reception of the inspiration that reaches into the finite consciousness from without. It is interesting that the word ‘affliction’, singular in Eliot, and plural in Coleridge, is used to describe the suffering experienced by both himself and Lisbeth: Coleridge’s ‘afflictions bow [him] down to earth’ (l. 82), and Dinah acknowledges that Lisbeth’s ‘affliction is great’ (p. 100). ‘Affliction’ can describe both the cause *and* the experience of pain; its use indicates an acknowledgement in both writers of the dual nature of experience. Each could have used the word ‘suffering’ without loss of meaning, but ‘affliction’ carries the implication of something originating from an external source, as well as its manifestation in the emotional experience of the afflicted. In Eliot, the external source is an event – the death of Thias – but in Coleridge, the ‘visitation’ (l. 84) of his afflictions occurs at the level of consciousness.

Many critics have identified Coleridge’s response to the natural world as the stimulus for his ‘shaping spirit of Imagination’, but ‘Dejection’ problematizes this interpretation.²² The ‘outward forms’ of nature are not the source of the ‘passion and the life’ of the imagination; rather, the ‘afflictions’ that ‘bow [Coleridge] down to earth’ describe a mental condition in

²² Nicholas Reid, for example, notes Coleridge’s preoccupation ‘with the world as *embodiment* of the divine mythos’ (*Coleridge, Form and Symbol, Or The Ascertaining Vision* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 63); Jean-Pierre Mileur argues that Coleridge ‘imaginatively transforms nature into the eternal language of God’ (*Vision and Revision: Coleridge’s Art of Immanence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 53).

which the consciousness is severed from apprehension of the infinite and limited to perception of the forms of the material world, rather than the immanence of the infinite within them. 'Dejection's' dialogue with Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode', especially its opening stanzas, is critically established; William A. Ulmer calls them 'the "Allegro" and "Penseroso" of romantic literature.'²³ Critical consensus identifies the oppositional nature of Wordsworth's location and apprehension of nature's 'celestial light' in the perceptions of childhood, and Coleridge's belief that this faculty may be sustained into adulthood, but, crucially, only in the perceptions of the undivided self.²⁴ Wordsworth's considerable influence on Eliot's writing is, as has been noted previously, well-established. Language links between the 'Immortality Ode', 'Dejection', and *Adam Bede* thus create an oblique bridging effect between Wordsworthian Eliot, Wordsworth, and Coleridge.

When Coleridge proposes that '[w]e in ourselves rejoice' (l. 72), he refers to the whole and undivided self, whose perceptions inform the sensory experience of the world; without the source, there can be no experience, no 'charm' in the world, and nothing to 'suffuse' with 'light' the materiality of experience (ll. 73 and 75). How, then, is Coleridge able to create poetry that so poignantly expresses his lack of connection with the source of his inspiration? Perhaps the answer is to be found in his formulation of the 'secondary imagination'. Described as 'an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency', the secondary imagination is, for Coleridge, a further reflection, or 'echo' of the infinite, and therefore represents the same type, or '*kind*' of experience.²⁵ It differs from the primary imagination, or direct reflection of the infinite, 'only

²³ William A. Ulmer, 'Radical Similarity: Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Dejection Dialogue', *English Literary History* 76: 1 (2009), pp. 189-213, (p. 193).

²⁴ William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollection of Early Childhood', in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 297-302, l. 4.

²⁵ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. 1, Ch. 13, p. 304.

in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation'²⁶. The '*degree*' of difference is alluded to by the word 'echo'; this reflection is slightly less distinct than that of the primary imagination. The '*mode* of [...] operation' refers to the coexistence of the secondary imagination 'with the conscious will', which shapes or moulds its expression, and is linked inextricably with it. Coleridge asserts that the secondary imagination 'dissolves, diffuses, [and] dissipates, in order to recreate', thus delineating the process whereby 'repetition' of the infinite is made expressible in human terms by its progress through the creative imagination, which has the ability to 'recreate' it in the concrete, communicable medium of language.²⁷ If, then, Coleridge is cut off from his primary imagination, he still possesses the echoes of the original experience, through memory and acts of will, that enable him to reproduce the original experience, now diffused and dissipated in his consciousness.

This distinction between the experience and the source of inspiration, and between its reception and reproduction, has been discussed at length, because – despite her assertions concerning the primacy of the 'observations of the senses' – Eliot shares Coleridge's conclusions concerning the external source of inspiration.²⁸ Dinah's reception of divine direction ensures that 'she was never left to herself; but it was always given to her when to keep silence and when to speak' (p. 104). In a further narrative intervention, Eliot states explicitly her conclusions regarding the source of 'inspiration':

And do we not all agree to call rapid thought and noble impulse by the name of inspiration? After our subtlest analysis of the mental process, we must still say, as Dinah did, that our highest thoughts and our best deeds are all given to us (p. 104).

There are striking parallels between Eliot's comments and Coleridge's assertion that his 'shaping spirit of Imagination' is something 'given' to, or bestowed upon him. Coleridge's

²⁶ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. 1, Ch. 13, p. 304.

²⁷ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. 1, Ch. 13, p. 304.

²⁸ George Eliot, *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney, cited in Ashton, *The German Idea*, p. 151.

subtle analysis of his own mental process may be problematized by his identification of 'nature' as the giver of his shaping spirit; however, his repetition of 'nature' and 'natural' point to an extremely complex use of these terms. He is not referring to organic processes, for example, when he writes of 'wedding Nature to us' (l. 68); this construction of 'nature' seems to refer to the sense of wholeness and reconciliation of different aspects of consciousness that enable the apprehension of '[a] new Earth and a new Heaven' (l. 69), a transformative experience conjoining human perceptions with the infinite.²⁹ Eliot, conversely, uses 'nature' and 'natural' to differentiate sensory experience from that which is supernatural, or involves the transcendent element of consciousness discussed by Coleridge. Describing Adam's premonitory experience of the 'stroke with the willow wand' that augurs the death of his father, Eliot is concerned to present the story 'as he told it, not attempting to reduce it to its natural elements: in our eagerness to explain impressions, we often lose our hold of the sympathy that comprehends them' (p. 46). There is a clear division here between the reductive 'natural elements' that explain phenomena in strictly empirical terms, and the (presumably) non-material factor of 'sympathy' that enables comprehension of the idea. This narrative comment aligns Eliot's concept of 'sympathy' with other non-material processes, such as 'direction', and also with Coleridge's concepts of inspiration and the faculty of 'Imagination'.

This way of thinking about non-material faculties and processes can be identified as Kantian in nature. Kant proposed that we must have the raw materials of knowledge in our sensory perceptions, or experience, of the world, but that we can only think about and organise them by applying a priori categories of knowledge. He formulated a distinction

²⁹ Biblical references to the 'new Earth' and 'new Heaven(s)', promised to God's faithful, could be seen as informing Coleridge's formulations of the creative imagination, because this faculty enables apprehension of 'the infinite I AM' (i.e. God). Isaiah 65: 17 and 66: 22; 2 Peter 3: 13; Revelation 21: 1, all King James version.

between ‘analytic’ and ‘synthetic’ a priori truths; the first, as Roger Scruton observes, are self-evident propositions, such as ‘all bachelors are unmarried’, but the second are propositions, such as ‘every event has a cause’, that ‘cannot be established through experience, since their truth is presupposed in the interpretation of experience’.³⁰ Synthetic a priori categories, argues Scruton, are ‘not just true on this or that occasion, but universally and necessarily’.³¹ The word ‘transcendental’ is used by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* to refer to all discourse that exceeds, or transcends, empirical observation, and Kant’s ‘transcendental idealism’ is the theory of applying a priori categories of understanding to experience. Or, as Coleridge puts it: ‘We learn all things indeed by *occasion* of experience; but the very facts so learnt force us inward on the antecedents, that must be pre-supposed in order to render experience possible.’³² Eliot expresses dissatisfaction with Kant’s theories, and in particular with the idea of the universality and necessity of synthetic a priori categories as a mode of understanding, arguing in 1855 that:

to deduce knowledge from them alone, and to make them a standing point higher than all experience [...] is an attempt to poise the universe on one’s head, and no wonder if dizziness and delusion are the consequence.³³

What Eliot seems to overlook here is the inextricable relationship, in Kant’s transcendental idealism, between experience and reason. Yet, if ‘sympathy’ is not itself a kind of priori category that enables comprehension of experience, Eliot’s assertions concerning its centrality to human understanding appear problematic. If ‘our highest thoughts and our best deeds are all given to us’, the ‘giving’ must precede the experience of thinking and doing them, as well as being inextricable from them. Eliot’s ‘sympathy’ diverges from Coleridge’s ‘Imagination’

³⁰ Roger Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 28.

³¹ Roger Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 30-31.

³² Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. I, Ch. 9, p. 142.

³³ George Eliot, *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney, cited in Ashton, *The German Idea*, p. 151.

in one crucial way: it is indivisible from human interaction. Thus, a quality rendered allusive and transcendental in Coleridge is expressed by Eliot as material, contained and observable. Dinah's character, and her actions, function as a vehicle for the abstract concept of sympathy, and enable Eliot to demonstrate its enactment on a material level.

The sense of isolation expressed in 'Dejection' is an expression of yearning for the absent beloved, but also, and primarily, of a division of the unified self, without which no kind of interaction – either with the infinite or with others – is possible for Coleridge. He attempts to regain his 'natural' capacity for oneness within himself by accessing his imagination; that this is his 'sole resource', and his 'only plan' (l. 91) emphasises his solitude, and the impossibility of aid originating in the actions of any other person. He tries to apprehend and access, through intellectual endeavour, or 'abstruse research' (l. 89), his suspended imagination. The imagery of splitting and fragmentation within the self is extended in his description of that 'part', the controlled and conscious mind, 'infect[ing] the whole' (l. 92). It is as though the self must first be broken down in order to reconcile its disparate and unobtainable parts in a cohesive whole. His observation that this process has 'now [...] almost grown the habit of my soul' (l. 93) conveys the way in which the resource of the intellect has 'almost' become his only, or 'sole', means of accessing the 'natural man' that existed before the fragmentation. Thus, he attempts, paradoxically, to regain wholeness through a further process of splitting, which has almost become habitual, but also, in an alternative construction, has become a 'habit' – a cover, cloak, or concealment – of his undivided self. In *Adam Bede*, Lisbeth's sense of isolation is caused by the loss of another person; this construction of the concept of division roots it in the external world of individuals and events. Emphasis is placed on this materiality by Eliot's depiction of the comforting influence of Dinah, whose power resides in her physical presence and practical acts. Both the cause and

the healing of the division are located by Eliot outside the self, in the world of human interaction.

When Coleridge writes of the ‘little child / Upon a lonesome wild’ who ‘screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear’ (ll.121-5), his identification with the isolated and helpless being is both affecting and affected. His verse has, by this point, acquired the tone and the tropes of sentimentality, and his expression of anguish has receded into a less immediate, more de-personalised representation that fails to convince as completely as the preceding parts of the poem. It is slightly uncanny that the image used to depict the lost soul, and the lost soul’s voice, is repeated so tragically in *Adam Bede*. Hetty’s abandoned child is, however, not the focus of Eliot’s concern; rather, it is the abandoning mother who occupies the textual space, and the crying child is the textual device allowing Eliot to return to the extended meditation on human interaction and influence informing *Adam Bede*. The points at which Eliot and Coleridge diverge, discussed in my introduction, centre on the distinctions between isolated and interactive human thought and endeavour; between the ‘shaping’ and the ‘subduing’ spirit; between the power of the reconciled self and the reconciling power of influence. These areas of divergence epitomise the way in which Eliot materialises ideas presented as transcendent in Coleridge.

Chapter Two

The Uses of Silence: Solitude, Society and Morality

The motif of silence is used repeatedly to signal, in Coleridge, isolation, self-contemplation, and intellectual freedom, and in Eliot, communication and its restriction, the influence of others, and the effects of causality. Differing presentations and uses of silence are predicated to a substantial extent on divergences in formulations of organicism. The distinctions between Coleridge's and Eliot's organicism are illustrated in their depictions of the self in relation to wider society. The historical separation between the social structures discussed by each writer makes correspondences in the language used to describe them even more remarkable. The language of invasion is used by both Coleridge and Eliot to address the power and extent of personal agency, and to explore relationships between individuals. Analysis of the contrasting approaches to materiality in Coleridge and Eliot reveals potential reasons for their divergent responses to Kant's categorical imperative, as well as further oppositions between theoretical and practical solutions to questions of the individual's moral responsibility.

The 'spirit-healing nook' in which Coleridge composes his meditation on his 'countrymen' in 'Fears in Solitude' is characterised by its stillness and silence.³⁴ It is a 'green and silent spot' (l. 1), suffused with the '[s]weet influences' (l. 21) of nature; but this is nature at its most benign. Coleridge's 'solitude' (l. 19) is secured and reinforced by the silence and stillness surrounding him, which enable his self-contemplation. It is paradoxical, then, that his 'meditative joy' (l. 23) is presented in the third person, as that of a 'humble man' (l. 14), who has 'found / Religious meanings in the forms of nature' (l. 24). In Kantian terms, he is regarding himself as both 'noumenon', or 'thing-in-itself', and 'phenomenon', or object,

³⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Fears in Solitude', pp. 239-244, ll. 12, 41. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

which is part of the empirical world; it is this two-fold self-perception that informs his relationship with his natural environment.

Kant's proposition that every change that occurs in nature has a cause, but that the originating self is distinct from, and independent of, causal necessity appears contradictory. His solution to this 'antinomy of freedom' was an extension of the central paradox of being: the law of cause and effect operates only in nature, the empirical realm; but freedom, the idea that 'I' originate thought and action, is located in the transcendental realm of consciousness, or reason. Therefore, 'I' exist both in nature *and* in the realm of conscious self-perception, as both 'phenomenon' and 'noumenon'.³⁵ Coleridge was to return to, and reinterpret, Kant's ideas and categories, particularly those of the understanding and the reason to which 'phenomenon' and 'noumenon' pertain, throughout his life. His organicism centres on a perception of himself as part of nature and, simultaneously, as an individuated non-material self whose will originates his actions.

Coleridge's projection of himself into the third person is a manifestation of the act of self-contemplation. His knowledge of the natural world, in Kantian terms, guarantees the existence of the 'I' that knows it, and his presentation in third-person terms of the unity of consciousness that allows him to think is both paradoxical and illustrative: he is observing in himself the process of contemplation. This is the philosophical basis for the splitting effect often conveyed in Coleridge's meditations on the nature of self. But what factor prompts this examination in 'Fears in Solitude'? Repeated references to the silence surrounding him in the opening movement of the poem suggest the centrality of silence to the meditative state. The sense of solitude necessary for self-reflection is fostered by silence, and it is the silence of the physically isolated place, rather than its remoteness, that crystallises the perception of his

³⁵ Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 74-5.

unity of consciousness for Coleridge. The motif of silence functions as a focus for self-consciousness, and all other perceptions are contingent upon it. The forms of nature are observed, but do not intrude into the silence; this allows Coleridge to project religious meanings on to them as an adjunct of consciousness.

Silence often functions as a point of origin for explorations of consciousness in Coleridge's poetry. It prompts and facilitates self-examination, and the expression of responses to the questions: 'who am I?'; 'how do I feel?'; 'how can I describe myself in the world?' Silence is also a recurring motif in Eliot's fiction, but instead of opening up self-expression, she often uses it to connote suppression of feeling. Although Eliot often depicts solitude as a catalyst for self-realisation, her uses of silence are predominantly regulatory in nature. All of the principal characters in *Middlemarch* are described as 'silent' at least once, and their silence is conditioned by an inability or disinclination to speak their feelings and responses. For example, when Rosamond Vincy is interrogated by her aunt concerning Lydgate's intentions towards her, her silence twice masks 'feelings' that are 'very unpleasant': 'Her pride was hurt, but her habitual control of manner helped her. "Pray excuse me, aunt. I would rather not speak on the subject"' (p. 278). Experiencing 'much mortification', she once again chooses 'to be silent' (p. 279). Here, silence regulates the expression of the confusion and shame occasioned by her assumptions concerning Lydgate's affection for her. Eliot's portrayal of Rosamond is famously unsympathetic, and the latter's discomfort may be intended as a source of vicarious malicious enjoyment; but it is not only the unsympathetic characters in *Middlemarch* whose feelings are regulated by silence.

When Farebrother presents Fred Vincy's suit to Mary Garth, he is 'silent for a minute or more' after her conditional rebuttal of Fred's hopes (p. 486). Because Farebrother is himself in love with Mary, his silence suppresses a declaration of his own feelings; when he is able to speak, it is with 'grave restrained emotion' (p. 486). When Mary is 'in her turn [...]

silent, wondering not at Mr Farebrother's manner but at his tone' (p. 486), she is suppressing a response to her perception of Farebrother's feelings for her. The role of duty, which will be discussed further, plays a large part in this suppression of feelings and, therefore, in the silence of both characters. Farebrother has 'gone magnanimously through a duty' (p. 487) that has caused him great emotional distress; Mary speaks her mind only because he convinces her that it is her duty to do so. Yet, she senses in Farebrother's manner what the silence between them signifies: 'something like the resolute suppression of a pain' (p. 487).

The uses of silence in Eliot and Coleridge illustrate the points of divergence identified in the previous chapter. Silence intensifies the isolation necessary for Coleridge to explore his creative process, while in Eliot it pertains to the processes of interaction between characters. For Coleridge, silence has a shaping quality, in that it conditions his responses to his material environment; Eliot uses silence to subdue strong emotions and create a barrier to their expression. In silence, Coleridge is able to access the power of his imagination, which is experienced within the self; silence in Eliot is aligned with the power of influence, because the influence of one character upon another often imposes silence, and prevents the expression of feeling. Of course, these divergences are informed by the differing modes of expression used by Coleridge and Eliot. The silence of isolation is necessary for Coleridge to have the conversation with himself that forms his poetic expression; the narrative structure of Eliot's prose is dependent upon interaction between characters, and silence is one component of that interaction, albeit one that inhibits and restricts, rather than allows, expression. Coleridge's silence is the silence of nature, over which he has no control; he does not condition his environment, only his responses to it. In Kantian terms, causal necessity denies his freedom, but practical reason insists upon it. Eliot's silence is elective, rather than imposed from without, and belongs primarily to the realm of consciousness. The lack of expression occasioned by the silence of her characters informs narrative suspense, because the

reader is aware, through descriptive narrative interventions, of what her characters do not say, and why.

Occasionally, Eliot uses silence not only to suppress, but also to attenuate feelings too painful to express, as when Harriet Bulstrode comforts her husband in his disgrace:

They could not speak to each other of the shame which she was bearing with him, or of the acts which had brought it down on them. His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent. Open-minded as she was, she nevertheless shrank from the words which would have expressed their mutual consciousness, as she would have shrunk from flakes of fire (p. 707).

The suppression of mutual feelings of shame is consonant with Eliot's strategic use of silence, but the confession and the promise have a religious quality corresponding to the 'spirit-healing' (l. 12) nature of Coleridge's 'green and silent spot' (l. 1). The comfort derived by husband and wife from what is *not* said foregrounds an aspect of silence in Eliot more correlative to its presentation in 'Fears in Solitude'. Mrs Bulstrode's deep aversion to speaking the subject of 'their mutual consciousness' has parallels in Coleridge's anguished consciousness of the suffering that lies beyond the silence enclosing him:

My God! it is a melancholy thing
For such a man, who would full fain preserve
His soul in calmness, yet perforce must feel
For all his human brethren' (ll. 29-32).

There is something beyond the silence that threatens to overwhelm and destroy. Both Coleridge and Eliot use the same word to describe it: the roar.

Eliot's celebrated formulation of 'the roar which lies on the other side of silence' (p. 182) mirrors the 'uproar' (l. 33) that, for Coleridge, 'weighs upon the heart' (l. 33); both are evinced, in Eliot conditionally so, by 'a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life' (p. 182). Silence is the element preventing the incursion of chaos into the consciousness.

Coleridge's 'uproar' describes human events that may be occurring outside the encircling silence of the dell, but the movement from self-reflection within this comforting boundary to

contemplation of what lies beyond is signalled by a change in consciousness, from looking inwards to looking outwards. Eliot's description posits a similar change in consciousness, from the 'stupidity' (p. 182) of egocentric perceptions to an overwhelming acuteness of sensibility, or sympathy, which recognises the suffering of others. Eliot's speculation that 'we should die of [that] roar' (p. 182) mirrors Coleridge's fervent wish that the fearful incursion should pass 'like the gust, that roared and died away' (l. 200).

Christopher Stokes notes the paradox that emerges in 'Fears in Solitude', between Coleridge's 'desire to stand outside society, [...] and a contradictory desire to enter the public sphere'.³⁶ These contradictory desires are reflected in the poem's movement from private contemplation to contemplation of wider society, social structures, and the vicissitudes of war. Stokes comments on the way in which the sounds envisaged – the 'thunder and the shout / And all the crash of onset; fear and rage' – function as voices '[t]earing at the borders of the reflective retreat'.³⁷ Ben Brice argues that Coleridge's description of the 'undetermined conflict' creates a sense of 'an unnervingly contingent present'.³⁸ The contingency of external events is echoed in a sense of threat to the unified self. The multitudinous nature of the world of men is emphasised repeatedly, and couched in the language of condemnation is a fear of that which 'murders the whole man' (l. 52), or destroys the unified self. The organs of state, 'courts, committees, institutions', engulf all 'dignity and power' (ll. 54-5); the power of the self to survive within societal structures seems to be constantly in question. Coleridge's organicism, his perception of himself as part of the natural world, of 'native Britain', his 'Mother Isle' (l. 182), fails to extend to his relationship with society, despite the repeated 'us' and 'we' of this section of the poem.

³⁶ Christopher Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime: From Transcendence to Finitude* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 39.

³⁷ Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime*, p. 44.

³⁸ Ben Brice, *Coleridge and Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 129-130.

Eliot's organicism, unsurprisingly, focuses on the relationships between individuals comprising the social system in a reciprocal relationship whereby they condition and are in turn conditioned by their cultural environment. While Coleridge portrays wider social structures as negative, implicitly corrupt and essentially static in 'Fears in Solitude', Eliot writes persuasively in *Middlemarch* of the 'constantly shifting [...] boundaries of social intercourse [which are] begetting new consciousness of interdependence' (p. 88). Social structures are portrayed as positive, organic, and active in their capacity to both form and be formed by the individuals they contain. This divergence in outlook is also a separation in time; earlier traditions of organicism were based on models that Tim Dolin calls 'anti-rationalist', in the sense of being impervious to investigation through the faculty of reason.³⁹ This tradition of organicism favoured metaphysical interpretations, in which the relationship of individual souls with the divine superseded any human interaction or organisation. Coleridge's perception of the organic nature of the world was thus predicated on the interconnectedness of all living things through their relationship with the divine, and the immanence of God within them. For later nineteenth-century writers like Eliot, Dolin argues, advances in earth sciences and evolutionary theory 'had demonstrated the essential unity of life forms and organic systems' in a way that could be applied to social organisms.⁴⁰ The effect of rationalist thought for writers of Eliot's generation was to undermine the idea that an individual could be separate from his or her social environment. Coleridge's portrayal of the moral turpitude of his society in 'Fears in Solitude' rejects implicitly the model of social organisation as a reciprocal process; the idea that social structures might be subject to empirical laws of cause and effect challenges the authority of the originating 'I' of the individual will.

³⁹ Dolin, *George Eliot*, p. 201.

⁴⁰ Dolin, *George Eliot*, p. 201.

The divergence in Eliot and Coleridge's views on society is implicit in their descriptions of civic institutions. Coleridge proposes that 'individual dignity and power [is] / Engulfed in 'courts, committees, institutions, / Associations and societies' (ll. 54-6), as though these forms of social organisation become alien entities separate from, and threatening to, the individuals comprising them. This threat is characterised as a force of nature; it engulfs, swallows up, and thereby obliterates, like a flood or an earthquake. Eliot's description of the evolution of societal structures uses similar imagery; individuals are 'caught in [...] currents', some 'political' in nature, and some 'ecclesiastical' (p. 88). These currents overwhelm the individuals caught up in them as irresistibly as Coleridge's engulfing institutions, but they are not threatening. Their power of containment does not obliterate, but instead carries along; they are moving and vital, rather than deadly. Eliot extends her metaphor to allude the 'few personages or families' who stand 'with rocky firmness amid all this fluctuation' (p. 88); individual resistance is futile, and 'in spite of solidity', they are 'slowly presenting new aspects' (p. 88), like rock worn away by water.

The passage in *Middlemarch* in which these observations appear is concerned primarily with the nature of change in society, and presents distinct contrasts between the old and the new. 'Old provincial society' (p. 88) – the society to which Coleridge belonged when he wrote 'Fears in Solitude' – is portrayed by Eliot as something gradually eroded and replaced by new perceptions of persons and place. But in delineating the development of 'civic mind' (p. 88) in provincial England, Eliot is drawing on research into the period, rather than personal recollection; the action of *Middlemarch* takes place between 1829 and 1832, when she was still a young girl. There are close correspondences between her depiction of the old social structures and Coleridge's perception of them, not only in terms of their stasis and solidity, but also in the language and imagery used to describe them. Coleridge's portrayal of social corruption uses the imagery of Christian worship; those with power in his society 'have

drunk up, demure as at a grace, / Pollutions from the brimming cup of wealth' (ll. 59-60). He rails against the way that 'freedom and the poor man's life' are bartered '[f]or gold, as at a market' (ll. 62-3). Eliot also draws parallels between financial and religious degeneracy in her description of the 'worship of the solar guinea' (p. 88) prevalent in old society. She goes on to foreground one of the fundamental influences in changing perceptions between her own and Coleridge's society when she observes that this 'worship' has 'become extinct' (p. 88). Here, language aligning religious structures with vested financial interests is inflected by language describing, in the terminology of evolutionary theory, the manner in which the old has been superseded by the new.

What Coleridge sees as the power of the individual to effect change, Eliot formulates as a contingent human capacity. In one of her prefatory dialogues, she makes explicit her views on power and personal agency:

1st Gent. Where lies the power, there let the blame lie too.
2nd Gent. Nay, power is relative; you cannot fright
 The coming pest with border fortresses,
 [...] All force is twain in one: cause is not cause
 Unless effect be there; and action's self
 Must needs contain a passive (p. 608).

Eliot engages with Kantian arguments concerning cause and effect, extending empirical laws to embrace human endeavour. K. M. Newton sees Eliot's affirmation of relativism in *Middlemarch* as part of her attack on 'the egotism and social alienation associated with the Romantics'; indeed, the divergence between Coleridge's perception of personal freedom and Eliot's philosophy of social interdependence could not be formulated more clearly than it is here.⁴¹ Where Coleridge distinguishes between the force of individual will and its external effects, Eliot contends that both are subject to the law of cause and effect. It is notable that

⁴¹ K. M. Newton, *George Eliot, Romantic Humanist*, p. 123.

both use the language of invasion and borders to discuss the extent of personal agency and the influence of human interaction. The feared invasion of 'Fears in Solitude' is also an incursion into Coleridge's sense of personal freedom; Eliot argues that any perceived division between the self and others is ineffectual, because it is illusory. All force is 'twain in one', rather than divisible into self and other; for her, no action can possibly be isolated from its effect upon others, or from its originating cause outside the self.

How, then, can the individual take responsibility for moral action in Eliot's formulation? In Kantian terms, the transcendental freedom implicit in the 'I' of consciousness allows us to deliberate and act, but freedom is not independent of the world in which it exists; rather, it defines the limits of our perspective on the empirical world.⁴² Coleridge and Eliot differ in their perceptions of the extent to which this perspective is conditioned by causal explanations. For Coleridge, as for Kant, actions are only free if they involve an autonomous will, which privileges individual freedom over the causality of nature, and reason over desire, self-interest, and other empirical conditions. Kant's proposal that the autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all the moral laws, and of all duties which conform to them, finds echoes in both Coleridge and Eliot. The categorical imperative proposed by Kant assumes that there is only one principle guiding the autonomous will; based on reason alone, this principle must be abstracted from all other conditions that circumscribe rational agents and their actions. It is universal in nature, but specific in its implementation, because it legislates behaviour. Kant's famous formulation of the categorical imperative is his 'golden rule': that we should do as we would be done by.⁴³ Neither Coleridge or Eliot disagree fundamentally with the golden rule; they diverge in their beliefs concerning the extent to which reason alone can determine

⁴² Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 76-77.

⁴³ Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 80-86.

decisions and actions, and moral actions are independent of causality. Put simply, when people act morally (rather than empirically) their actions have both causes and reasons. Eliot believes that morality can be commanded by duty, as an external, legislating cause, and Coleridge believes that morality emanates from an innate sense of duty that is based on reason alone. The distinction may seem fine, but it is central to divergences in their respective understanding and presentation of moral agency and the way in which individuals engage with the world.

Once again, the uses of silence in Coleridge and Eliot can provide a way into their divergent outlooks on the function of individual actions and their moral dimensions. The 'strange / And extreme silentness' (ll. 9-10) of Coleridge's environment in the opening stanza of 'Frost at Midnight' 'vexes meditation' (l. 9). This seems contradictory in the light of previous assertions concerning the necessity of silence for self-contemplation in Coleridge's work. But this silence, this 'hush of nature' (l. 17), is too extreme; there is no ambient natural sound to facilitate the inward journey. Instead, the silence promotes a sense of the uncanny, because it creates a separation from the natural, as well as the human, world. Usually, silence would 'suit[s] / Abstruser musings' (ll. 5-6), but this uncanny calmness provokes the startled reflection that what is outside, '[s]ea, hill, and wood, / This populous village!' (ll. 10-11) may not exist, because they are not visually or audibly perceptible. The repetition of 'sea, hill, and wood' has an incantatory quality, as though recitation can will them into existence; they are touchstones for Coleridge's sense of being in the world. As in 'Fears in Solitude', self-contemplation provokes contemplation of wider humanity; the multitudinous nature of the human world is once more emphasised. The village is 'populous' (l. 11), and the 'goings on of life' 'numberless' (l. 12). The silence, however, guarantees Coleridge's separation from them; they may be populous and numberless, but they are also '[i]naudible as dreams' (l. 13). That the existence and actions of other people are inaudible and dreamlike emphasises their

uncanny nature, and promotes Coleridge's sense of alienation. Also, if the human world is dreamlike, its status and power as a real phenomenon is attenuated, and within the control of the dreamer. The 'ought' that signals the categorical imperative is, therefore, dispensed with; if humanity is a dream, the dreamer has no compunction to act in response to it.

Dorothea Brooke also contemplates the outside world from within, following her night of spiritual and emotional crisis. The language used to describe her perceptions of wider humanity closely parallels Coleridge's; rather than resulting in a similar passivity and separation, however, Dorothea's 'vivid sympathetic experience' asserts itself 'as a power', enabling action (p. 741). Eliot shows Dorothea, in her silence and isolation, viewing the world outside through the window of her boudoir. Unlike Coleridge, she is able to see people going about their daily business; the numberless goings on of life are visible to her, rather than concealed. The scene before her conveys with immediacy 'the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance' (p. 741). 'Manifold' has the same meaning as 'populous' and 'numberless', but instead of inducing alienation and a dreamlike passivity, the silent scene instils a sense of purposeful action. Rather than confirming her separation, the outside world's largeness confirms Dorothea's inclusion and involvement within it: she is 'part of that involuntary, palpitating life' (p. 741). Eliot's organicism could be summarised in this one phrase. Social life is an organism, with its own rhythms that palpitate like a pulse in the body, and no individual has a choice about whether or not to be part of it, because it is an involuntary condition of humanity. This assertion crystallises the difference between Coleridge and Eliot's organicism; for Coleridge, the autonomy of the will means that he possesses the ability to stand outside and observe the numberless goings on of life. His involvement, or lack of it, is voluntary.

Dorothea seeks the morally correct action that enables her to 'rule her errant will' (p. 741) and overcome the pain that is conditioning her responses. The will is presented as a

malleable, rather than fixed, capacity, which may be regulated by the imposition of external influence. Eliot uses silence, once again, as a controlling mechanism that defends the self against painful emotion, when Dorothea speculates that the answer would come to her if she could ‘clutch [her] own pain, and compel it to silence’ (p. 741). Because of the immediacy of Dorothea’s involvement with her fellow human beings, she invokes the categorical imperative: ‘[w]hat *should* I do - how *should* I act now, this very day [...]?’ (p. 741, my emphases). Thus, Eliot portrays organicism as the root of morality; she depicts ‘direct fellow-feeling’ (p. 582), or sympathy, as a necessary precondition for moral thought and action.

Eliot’s organicism differs from Coleridge’s in the extent of its materiality. Her depiction of Dorothea’s moral resolution demonstrates the extent to which action and interaction are essential to morality, because Dorothea asks not ‘what should I think’, but ‘what should I *do*’. Coleridge maintained that ‘philosophy in its first principles must have a practical or moral, as well as theoretical or speculative side’, but his attempts to demonstrate that practicality in his poetry often founder on his difficulties with materiality and material objects.⁴⁴ In ‘Frost at Midnight’, he attempts to present a ‘mirror’ (l. 22) of self through a material object, the film that flutters on the grate. He initially identifies with the ‘sole unquiet thing’ (l. 16) because of its uncanny and alien qualities, which echo his own alienation and uncanny perceptions of the outside world. As well as identification with its unquietness, though, he is able to effect a separation between himself, ‘me who live’ (l. 18), and its ‘companionable form’ (l. 19). The ‘companionable’ imbues it with a kind of persona and agency, but it is distinguishable from a living form by this juxtaposition.

Coleridge revised this section of the poem many times between 1798 and 1829; some of the most prominent changes occur in his depiction of the relationship between ‘spirit’ and

⁴⁴ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. I, Ch. 12, p. 251.

‘thing’ [APPENDIX 1].⁴⁵ Every revision prior to the 1829 version contains the assertion that ‘the living spirit in our frame / [...] loves not to behold a lifeless thing’ (ll. 21-2); the continual revisions suggest that the interaction between self and other, ‘spirit’ and ‘lifeless thing’, was problematic for Coleridge. This juxtaposition remains, almost intact, while the surrounding lines inflect the relationship in various ways, through successive revisions. In the 1829 version, the emotive ‘loves not’ and ‘lifeless thing’ are elided, in a compression of previous variations. The final form of the poem, which appeared in all subsequent editions of Coleridge’s poetry, presents the unquiet thing as an ‘echo or mirror’ of ‘the idling Spirit’ (ll. 22, 20). The film is no longer a ‘lifeless thing’ that the spirit ‘loves not’; the problematic division between self and world has been commuted, and the material object is presented as an adjunct of non-material consciousness. With this adaptation, the thing loses its materiality, its thingness, and becomes subsumed by Coleridge’s reflections on the non-material self. This demonstrates his difficulties in bringing to fruition a synthesis of the theoretical and practical in his poetry in accordance with his assertion of the necessity of such a synthesis.

Coleridge’s attempts to materialise his metaphysical speculations appear doomed to failure, and this has implications for the enactment of morality in his poetry. The speculations are mirrored back on the self, in an enclosed loop of referentiality, and there is no answer to the question, ‘what should I do - how should I act?’ Eliot, by contrast, portrays morality as a process that engages with the world and others, and returns to inform and enhance the moral viewpoint of the individual. This is the process of sympathy she champions throughout her novels; one in which the individual realises ‘with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling - an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of

⁴⁵ Jack Stillinger, *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), pp. 154-7. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

objects', that others have 'an equivalent centre of self' (p. 198). Coleridge's resistance to materiality condemns him to a passive isolation, from which he can only 'yearn for human kind' (l. 232), as he does at the conclusion of 'Fears in Solitude'. Dorothea, in yearning 'towards the perfect Right' (p. 741), exemplifies Eliot's belief in the power of duty, and of moral action in the world. Her representation of the poetic soul as one 'in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge' (p. 209), depicts a process that bypasses involvement with others and, therefore, the attainment of sympathy; it seems an uncannily accurate description of Coleridge's poetic method.

Both Coleridge and Eliot reflected extensively on the nature and performance of duty. As Rosemary Ashton points out, Kant's insistence on the performance of duty for its own sake was an element of his philosophy that 'repelled' Coleridge, who felt that duty and sympathy must be inherent and instinctual in the human response: '[d]oes even the sense of Duty rest satisfied with mere *Actions*, in the vulgar sense, does it not demand, & therefore produce, Sympathy itself as an Action?'⁴⁶ This comment could be read as an assertion of the inextricable nature of the 'Impulse', as Coleridge called it, of sympathy, and the performance of duty. It could equally be construed as a manifesto for duty as an innate, rather than experiential quality, which requires no 'mere' action, 'in the vulgar sense', to make it real. Eliot's commitment to the enactment of duty as a means of obtaining the sympathetic knowledge that liberates her characters from egoistic moral stupidity is encapsulated in Dorothea's question: 'What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?' (p. 691). Her formulation of duty is both more active and more interactive in nature than Coleridge's: we 'make' life less difficult 'to each other'. Just as silence is often a faculty used

⁴⁶ Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. K. Coburn (London: Pantheon, 1957), Vol. 1, 1705.

to attain the self-command necessary for moral action in Eliot, and an external condition necessary for self-exploration in Coleridge, duty in Eliot enhances human interaction, while in Coleridge it remains latent and theoretical.

Chapter Three

Symbolic Gestures: Narrative, Community, and Subjectivity

In 1861 Henry Crabb Robinson compared Eliot's *Silas Marner* with Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner'. He noted the novel's 'great affinity' to the poem: 'A little child, its mother having frozen to death at his solitary hovel, is taken in by Silas [...] it is to him what the blessing of the animals is to the Ancient Mariner.'⁴⁷ U. C. Knoepfelmacher contends that: '[b]oth *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner* hark back to those poems of severance, loss, and expiation that had haunted the imaginations of Coleridge and Wordsworth at the turn of the century.'⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Knoepfelmacher suggests that '[t]he man called 'Old Master Marner' belongs and does not belong to that disinherited race of wanderers who roam through the *Lyrical Ballads*. [...] His surname suggests his kinship to Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.'⁴⁹ While connections between *Silas Marner* and 'The Ancient Mariner' have been made before, none has focused on consonance and dissonance in the language, narrative structure, and use of symbolism of each in relation to the other. Close readings of the texts produce startling correspondences in the language used to describe alienation and isolation, ideas of community, and the experience of disembodied states. At the same time, the narrative of each text can be read as a reversal of the other, and each employs remarkably similar metaphorical language to characterise the nature of narrative.

Of his contributions to 1798's *Lyrical Ballads*, which included 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', Coleridge wrote: 'the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least,

⁴⁷ Henry Crabb Robinson, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 3 vols, ed. Edith Morley (London: J. M. Dent, 1938), vol. 2, pp. 800-801.

⁴⁸ U. C. Knoepfelmacher, 'Wordsworthian Child of Nature', in U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (eds), *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 418. Many critics have noted Wordsworth's influence on *Silas Marner*; David Carroll, for example, mentions the 'many Wordsworthian echoes' in the novel in his notes to the edition used here (George Eliot, *Silas Marner*, ed. David Carroll (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 192, n. 6).

⁴⁹ Knoepfelmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels*, p. 233.

supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real.’⁵⁰ Of Eliot’s comments concerning her intentions in writing *Silas Marner*, those on creating ‘a sufficiently real background [...] so that the presentation will lay hold on the emotions as human experience’ are significantly consonant with the qualities as those championed by Coleridge: the power of the emotions to engage, and the employment of elements ‘real’ enough to convince.⁵¹ Coleridge’s inclusion of supernatural ‘incidents and agents’ does not detract from the emotional power and impact of the ‘Mariner’, but his rendering of their effects produces a lack of coherence in his narrative radically at odds with the moral cohesion imposed on Eliot’s ‘legendary’ tale. One of the fundamental reasons for this divergence is the differing treatments of subjectivity in each narrative, which inform, and are informed by, agency, moral responsibility, and materiality.

One of the most significant features of the narrative structures employed by Coleridge and Eliot is their reversal of each other. *Silas Marner* ends with a wedding feast, and the ‘Mariner’ commences with one. In *Marner*, the wedding reconciles various elements of the plot, and Marner’s future status as an integral part of a family unit and of Raveloe’s community is ensured. The garden described in the penultimate paragraph of the novel is enclosed with stone walls on two sides, but presents a vista on the third, through which flowers greet the homecoming family ‘with answering gladness’.⁵² The combination of

⁵⁰ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. II, Ch. 14, p. 6. The version of ‘The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere’ that appeared in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* has been used in this comparison because of Eliot’s reference to it in *Adam Bede*, the chronology of which [commencing ‘in the year of our Lord 1799’], supports this choice. For clarity, however, the most common spelling of the title, ‘The Ancient Mariner’, abbreviated to ‘Mariner’ is used henceforth.

⁵¹ George Eliot, letter to Frederick Harrison, 15 August 1866, in *Selections from George Eliot’s Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 318.

⁵² George Eliot, *Silas Marner*, ed. David Carroll (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 183. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

security with a joyful and generative future is not difficult to extrapolate from this symbolism. Conversely, the wedding feast at the beginning of the 'Mariner' posits stability in its ritual, family, and community dimensions that is immediately broken up by the Mariner's waylaying of the next of kin, which fragments the unity of the celebrations.

Fragmentation is the predominant motif of the narrative, which resists attempts to impose a unified meaning on its events and characters. The Mariner himself does not direct the action; despite his centrality, 'he does not act, but is continually acted upon', and his passivity negates the possibility of a story unified by stable characterisation, because events regulate his actions, rather than the opposite.⁵³ These events, 'having no necessary connection do not produce each other', as Wordsworth observed.⁵⁴ In Kantian terms, the operation of an autonomous will is omitted from the narrative, but so too is the law of causality. The absence of any system, either empirical or rational, by which narrative events may be understood, results in the unobtainability of a coherent framework for interpretation.⁵⁵ The Mariner is separated from his country, his community of fellow mariners, and his vessel, which is finally broken up. Marner finds a new country, a new community, and a stable home that overcomes the threat of fragmentation presented by Eppie's marriage. Yet, despite the oppositional nature of their plots, the 'Mariner' and *Silas Marner* contain 'strange, striking' similarities in their language, imagery, and use of symbolism.

Even though their narrative structures diverge so dramatically, the function of narratives as the telling of stories is foregrounded in both the 'Mariner' and *Marner*. The verbal qualities of storytelling are alluded to in Eliot's passing reference to 'the rapid use of

⁵³ William Wordsworth's prefatory note to 'The Ancient Mariner' in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, quoted in Keach's notes to 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', in Coleridge, *The Complete Poems*, p. 497.

⁵⁴ Keach's notes to the 'Mariner' in *The Complete Poems*, p. 497.

⁵⁵ As Edward E. Bostetter observes, in his seminal article 'The Nightmare World of "The Ancient Mariner"': 'Coleridge has created the kind of universe [...] in which [the Mariner is] at the mercy of arbitrary and unpredictable forces.' *Studies in Romanticism*, 1:4 (1962), pp. 241-54, p. 251.

that difficult instrument the tongue', which alienates the 'honest folk' (p. 5) of village communities like Raveloe. 'I have strange power of speech', claims the Mariner, and, in spite of the alienating effect caused by his appearance and manner, this strange power compels his listeners, who 'cannot chuse but hear'.⁵⁶ The uncanny power of speech is alluded to in both narratives: Godfrey Cass is 'unexpectedly awed by the weaver's direct truth-speaking' (p. 170); and the Mariner's repeated 'Listen, Stranger!' (ll. 45, 49, 205) reinforces both the imperative nature and the strange, uncanny quality of his speech.

The thing that Silas Marner, the weaver of Raveloe, weaves, and the Mariner tells, is the 'tale' (p. 9; l. 623). Weaving is a relatively straightforward metaphor for storytelling; read in conjunction with the Mariner's compulsive tale-telling, though, it takes on a different aspect. The 'tale' of the cloth woven by Marner is its amount, or number of pieces, and the telling, or (re)counting, of the tale is an indication of its weight. Metaphors proliferate, revealing a symbolic language shared by Eliot and Coleridge. Eliot claimed that the inspiration for *Silas Marner* was her 'recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen-weaver with a bag on his back', and her novel describes 'these pale men [who] rarely stirred abroad without that mysterious burden' (p. 5).⁵⁷ The burden of the tale is the weight of its telling; an apposite summary of the Mariner's burden. The mystery of the burden is in its unknowable qualities; its concealment, from visual interpretation in *Marner* and from rational interpretation in the 'Mariner' presents intriguing parallels. Knoepfmacher notes the way in which 'the factual and symbolic qualify each other' in *Silas Marner*; Eliot's factual descriptions also function as symbolic representations of her own and Coleridge's themes.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere' in Seven Parts, in *The Collected Poems*, pp. 147-167, ll. 620, 22, 42. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

⁵⁷ George Eliot, letter to John Blackwood, 24 February 1861, in *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, p. 258.

⁵⁸ Knoepfmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels*, p. 233.

The 'hopeless riddle' of Marner's 'strange world' (p. 19) aptly describes that in which the Mariner is compelled to tell and retell his tale; 'he might, if he had a less intense nature, have sat weaving, weaving - looking towards the end of his pattern, or towards the end of his web, till he forgot the riddle' (p. 19), comments Eliot. The Mariner's inability to offer interpretation of his experiences, combined with the 'anguish [that] comes and makes me tell' (l. 617), is redolent of that 'weaving, weaving' which sees only the end of the pattern – the possibility of redemption – and omits the reasons for, or answers to, the riddle of how and why the situation has come about; like the Mariner, Marner seems 'to weave [...] from pure impulse, without reflection' (p. 16). The 'monotony' of the loom, which fills Marner's hearing, the 'sameness' of the web he weaves, and the 'repetition' of his movements (p. 21) exemplify the combination of factual and symbolic representation in Eliot that describes, with equal poignancy, the lives of both Marner and the Mariner.

While the loose threads of Marner's life are eventually woven together by Eliot, the Mariner's story presents a progressive unravelling of the factors that humanise and situate characters in narratives. This dehumanisation of character evinces the Hermit's appalled '[s]ay quick [...] I bid thee say, / What manner of man art thou?' (ll. 609-10). Prior to Marner's redemption through his relationship with Eppie, Eliot places him outside the web of community and familial relationships, as isolated a character as the Mariner. Characters like Marner are 'to the last regarded as aliens by their rustic neighbours, and usually contract[ed] the eccentric habits which belong to a state of loneliness' (p. 6); this description identifies succinctly the alienation evoked by individuals like the Mariner, who wanders 'from land to land', and cannot be placed, or have no place, within the interrelationships of the narrative. The language of isolation in *Marner* corresponds closely to that in the 'Mariner'. Marner recognises himself as a 'lone thing' (p. 118), and a 'lone man' (p. 149), while the Mariner creates a refrain from his lone state: 'Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on the wide, wide

Sea' (ll. 224-5). The expanse around him emphasises the smallness of his individual existence, and this imagery is paralleled in the observation that the loss of his gold leaves Marner's 'soul like a forlorn traveller on an unknown desert' (p. 44). Reference to the soul introduces a further dimension of loneliness: that of spiritual isolation, a theme which is woven through Coleridge's poem, and is summarised in the Mariner's anguished observation: 'So lonely 'twas, that God himself / Scarce seemèd to be there' (ll. 632-3).

Further parallels in the depiction of physical and spiritual desolation are to be found in references in both narratives to the country of origin. These references bring together several aspects of the lone state: separation from community; estrangement from familiar customs and beliefs; loss of origins; and lack of connection with the divine. Marner's observation that 'your ways are different: my country was a good way off' (p. 124) is spoken in the context of a conversation about the appropriate moral and religious education for Eppie; Dolly's distress concerning Marner's apparent lack of familiarity with prayers mistakes his unfamiliarity with local religious forms for absence of knowledge of God. The Mariner's joyful recognition of 'the Hill [and] the Kirk' (l. 471) is inflected by his questioning of whether this is truly his 'own countrèe' (l. 472), and the instability of his perceptions turns out to be justified. The Hermit, who represents local religious authority in the 'Mariner', 'loves to talk with Marineres / That come from a far Contrèe' (ll. 550-1); his willingness to embrace the unfamiliar in this way makes doubly poignant his rejection of a man whose faith originates in his own country, who regards him as a figure with the power to redeem his perceived sins, and yet who is unrecognisable and appalling to him. Although he is now 'in [his] own Countrèe' (l. 603), the Mariner experiences loss of home at the deepest and most painful level.

Marner's return to his 'old country' is inextricably linked with his sense of origin; it is 'the town where [he] was born' (p. 177). The 'old place is all swep' away', however, and

Marner concludes that 'the old home's gone' (p. 179). Not only are his home and his origin unobtainable; his sense of religious place is also lost to him in the sweeping away of the chapel and the graveyard. The reversal of narratives becomes once more apparent here; having lost his original home, Marner concludes that he has 'no home but [Raveloe] now' (p. 179); but the Mariner's 'woeful agony' (l. 612) on the discovery of his irretrievable loss of home and the possibility of redemption 'forc[es]' (l. 613) the compulsive repetition of his tale. Eliot gives Marner the wholeness to choose a new home, but Coleridge amplifies the Mariner's fragmentation, instability, and estrangement.

Despite the Mariner's strange power of speech, and his intuitive power to 'know the man that must hear' him (l. 622), he is unable to free himself from the constraining force of his periodic 'anguish' (l. 617). Marner, too, is subject to recurrent 'visitation[s]' (p. 12), in which he is 'arrested [...] by the invisible wand of catalepsy' (p. 110). Eliot's descriptions of Marner's epileptic fits imbue them with uncanny dimensions; these centre on ambiguity about whether he is dead or alive. Similar ambiguities abound in the Mariner's description of his fellow mariners; a large part of the supernatural horror of the 'Mariner' is produced by the animation of his supposedly dead shipmates. Language similarities in these descriptions are notable for their focus on the eyes and the gaze. Marner is described by the local girls as 'a dead man come to life again', partly because of his 'pale face and unexampled eyes', and partly because of Jem Rodney's discovery of Marner in a cataleptic state, when his eyes are 'set like a dead man's' (p. 8). The Mariner is horrified by 'the curse in a dead man's eye' (l. 250), the accusing 'look' (l. 247) concentrated upon him by the other mariners. Marner's myopic 'gaze' (p. 6) has malign powers attributed to it by the local boys; it is 'always enough to make them take to their legs in terror' in the belief that the 'dreadful stare could dart cramp, or rickets, or a wry mouth' (p. 6). As well as language similarities, there is a further reversal of effect in these portrayals. The power of the malign gaze is attributed, albeit through

superstition, to Marner; this enables Eliot to demonstrate the power of sympathy to overcome aversion based on ignorance of a person's true nature, as she does in depicting Marner's integration into the community. The Mariner, however, is the object of the malign gaze, and the curse is projected on to him, rather than by him. There is no reconciliation for him, as there is for Marner; his shipmates' spirits are eventually liberated, but his memory of 'the pang, the curse, with which they died' (l. 443) remains unameliorated.

The words 'fit' and 'trance' are used in relation to both Marner and the Mariner, further blurring the boundaries between conscious and unconscious, dreaming and waking states, and contributing to the uncanny dimensions of their subjects. Marner regards his fits as a state of being 'not in the body, but out of the body' (p. 12). One feature of the Mariner's trance (l. 435) distinguishes it from Marner's: he is subjected to an otherworldly discourse debating his actions and their consequences. Eliot ensures that the reader will place no supernatural interpretation on Marner's fits by emphasising 'the absence [...] of any spiritual vision during his outward trance' (p. 10). She portrays the villagers' superstitious fears about Marner's 'fits' (p. 8) in the context of her own empirical explanation, while simultaneously promoting, through descriptive language, the defamiliarising effect upon Marner's neighbours. Coleridge offers no contextual information concerning the Mariner's trance, or any of his experiences; they could be visionary or delusional in nature. The Mariner perceives himself as having been, like Marner, in a disembodied state, in which his 'soul discern[s]' (l. 401) his experience, but his 'living life' (l. 400) has momentarily left him. Like his fellow mariners, the Mariner's status as a living being is suspended. Marner is similarly depicted as a non-living being in repeated references to his appearance as 'an apparition' (pp. 55, 114) and 'an apparition from the dead' (p. 114).

However, these uncanny constructions of character serve to highlight the differing narrative directions of their authors. Eliot's portrayal of Marner as strange, estranged and

otherworldly enables her to depict his redemption through Eppie. In contrast with his soulless state, he is once more part of the natural and human world, 'his soul, long stupefied in a cold narrow prison, [...] trembling gradually into full consciousness' (p. 126). Conversely, the Mariner's perception that he may have 'died in sleep, / And [become] a blessed Ghost' (ll. 299-300) is not reversed; rather, it is compounded by his self-depiction as '[l]ike one that hath been seven days drown'd' (l. 585), and by the responses of his rescuers and the Hermit. He remains otherworldly and, with his 'glittering eye' (ll. 3, 17), reminiscent of his dead shipmates. Even his resemblance to them does not broker a sense of community with the other mariners. When they re-animate and begin once more to 'work the ropes' (l. 329), it is in eerie silence, and the Mariner, standing next to 'the body of [his] brother's son' (l. 333) pulls at the same rope, but is not acknowledged or spoken to. In the midst of this 'ghastly crew' (l. 332), it is himself that the Mariner perceives as other; he 'quake[s] to think of [his] own voice / How frightful it would be!' (ll. 337-8). Later, he believes himself to be invisible to the living dead who surround him: '[t]hought I, I am as thin as air - / They cannot me behold' (ll. 376-7). Even in the company of the undead, the Mariner is separate, his sense of identity estranged, and all possibility of community fragmented. Eppie enables Marner's understanding of himself as an integral part of community life, from which he had previously 'stood aloof as from a strange thing, wherewith he could have no communion' (p. 130).

Coleridge and Eliot use similar symbolic language to describe the potential for a reversal of isolation, and the possibility of communion, in two events that mirror each other structurally as well as linguistically: when the Mariner blesses the water-snakes, and Eppie is drawn by the light from Marner's cottage. Eppie sees the 'bright glancing light on the white ground', and is 'immediately absorbed in watching the bright living thing' (p. 109). The water-snakes move 'in tracks of shining white' (l. 266), their beauty provoking the Mariner's exclamation, 'O happy living things!' (l. 274). Of symbolism, Coleridge wrote that '[a]n

IDEA, in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*'; in Kantian terms, symbols function as 'metaphorical substitutes for the transcendent realities they purport to describe', as Brice summarises.⁵⁹ The symbolic nature of the language used by both Coleridge and Eliot in these descriptions can be inferred from the supernatural, or transcendent, qualities attributed to the things described. Eppie's physical situation in the snowy night is life-threatening, and the light represents her rescue on a practical level; on a symbolic level, it functions as a metaphorical substitute for the idea of Marner's redemption from the darkness of his isolation. The whiteness of the snow-covered ground is a symbolic manifestation of the purity of the child's innocence, an appropriate backdrop for her role as the bringer of hope into Marner's life. The bright living thing is, therefore, simultaneously the physical light issuing from Marner's cottage, the person of Eppie, and the qualities she represents in the narrative.

The tracks of the water-snakes are 'shining white'; their supernatural dimensions are emphasised by the 'elfish light' (l. 267) generated by their movements. Unlike the light seen by Eppie, however, they are resistant to material interpretation; they are held fast in the realm of metaphor and potential. Rather than offering a material means of escaping his predicament, as the light from Marner's cottage does for both himself and Eppie, their shining white tracks remain separated, elementally, in water which would drown the Mariner should he follow their light. His only possible connection with them is visual and emotional. They function as metaphorical substitutes for the possibility of redemption, because their indescribable beauty causes the Mariner to bless them, thereby recovering his ability to pray, upon which the Albatross falls from his neck. However, his act of prayer does not free him from either his physical entrapment or psychological burden. The water-snakes enable a 'spring of love' (l.

⁵⁹ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. I, Ch. 9, p. 156; Brice, *Coleridge and Scepticism*, p. 93.

276) to issue from the Mariner's heart; like Eppie, they have the power to effect this change, but the Mariner is unable to sustain it. Both the Mariner and Marner are passive recipients of gifts; the 'flash of golden fire' (l. 273) caused by the water-snakes' tracks and the gold of Eppie's hair in the firelight are uncannily analogous. If the water-snakes symbolise the transformative power of love in the 'Mariner', that power is realised only contingently. Eliot's symbolic use of light and the living thing illustrates Marner's assertion that 'things *will* change' (p. 149); Coleridge's symbolism, despite the vital dimensions of the happy living things, reinforces the unchanging nature of the Mariner's alienation.

Symbolism is also used in both narratives to denote disruption to ethical order. In Eliot this is temporary, but in Coleridge moral signification is more radically and permanently unsettled. The drawing of lots to determine Marner's guilt or innocence at the beginning of *Silas Marner* results in the initial injustice that drives him away from his religious community and causes the 'despair in his soul [and a] shaken trust in God and man, which is little short of madness to a loving nature' (p. 14). Eliot's narrative requires faith to be lost in order to demonstrate the power of love to restore it. No such restoration is possible in the 'Mariner'; he is, by his own confession, guilty of killing the Albatross, and his despair is enduring. Stokes comments on 'the inability of readers to fully rationalise [...] ethical order' in the 'Mariner', because of the apparent randomness of the killing and all subsequent events, and the fact that 'the bird seems to have no obvious or lucid moral or religious significance.'⁶⁰ This element of randomness is paralleled in the playing of dice for the souls of the mariners, which is in turn mirrored by the drawing of lots to decide Marner's fate.

Although the Mariner views his act as a sin, this is not the definitive verdict on the killing; even his fellow mariners cannot decide whether it has brought good or bad luck:

⁶⁰ Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime*, pp. 86-7.

‘[a]nd I had done an hellish thing [...] For all averr’d, I had kill’d the Bird / That made the Breeze to blow’ (ll. 91-2) is countered in the following stanza by ‘Then all averr’d, I had kill’d the Bird / That brought the fog and mist. / ‘Twas right, said they, such birds to slay’ (ll. 95-7). This *volte face* is occasioned by the sunrise that dispels the mist; when the weather changes again, the mariners once more change their minds. These ‘arbitrary and unpredictable forces’, as Bostetter calls them, deprive the Mariner of any sense of agency; his act is ‘a compulsive sin which strips away the illusion of freedom and reveals just how helpless he is.’⁶¹

Eliot gives Marner a far greater sense of agency, although this is also contingent.

When his gold is stolen, he agonises over the thief’s identity:

Was it a thief who had taken the bags? or was it a cruel power that no hands could reach which had delighted in making him a second time desolate? He shrank from his vaguer dread, and fixed his mind with struggling effort on the robber with hands, who could be reached by hands (p. 44).

Marner’s focus on hands is an attempt to make the responsibility for the crime material and tangible; human, rather than the act of a ‘cruel power’, over which there is no possibility of control. Hands denote human agency, for Eliot, and this is particularly compelling in the context of Coleridge’s multiple references to the Mariner’s ‘skinny hand’ (ll. 13, 217, 221). If a cruel power is responsible for the Mariner’s suffering, these allusions are problematic. The Mariner’s hand ‘holds’ (l. 13) the wedding-guest, and is an object of fear to him; if the Mariner is not culpable, there is no apparent reason for his hand to inspire such revulsion. The spiralling instability of events in the ‘Mariner’ undermines causal links, including the causality of reason, and the link between the act and its moral consequences is likewise troubled. It could be that the thinness of the Mariner’s hand is a device to render him uncanny, more corpse-like – at one point, the wedding-guest is unsure if he is alive or dead –

⁶¹ Bostetter, ‘The Nightmare World of “The Ancient Mariner”’, p. 251.

but the repetition implies his sense of culpability, regardless of the absence of causal evidence supporting his subjective viewpoint.

Stokes observes that ‘the subject is something that can terrify itself and struggles to know itself’.⁶² The dialogue heard by the Mariner in his trance is unequivocal on one point: his moral responsibility for the death of the ‘harmless Albatross’ (l. 406). One voice is harshly judgemental, and stresses, in Christ’s name, the cruelty of a crime against love; the other, a ‘softer voice’ (l. 411) argues that the Mariner ‘hath penance done, / And penance more will do’ (ll. 413-4). Each of these voices could be projection of the Mariner’s own subjectivity, his sense of a ‘guilt resistant to rational explication’, as Stokes puts it.⁶³ Could it be his own subjectivity that haunts the Mariner, producing his anguish and compelling the repetition of his tale? His request to be shriven of his sin by the Hermit suggests that this is so; it is ‘the Albatross’s blood’ (l. 546) that he wishes washed away, and there is no robust analogy here, despite suggestive symbolic links, with the redemption of sins through Christ’s blood. The mistaken identity of the sin to be expiated is mirrored in the necessity of Marner’s atonement, in the eyes of his church, for a sin he has not committed, for ‘only on confession, as the sign of repentance, could he be received once more within the fold of the church’ (p. 13).

The community thus restored to Marner would be predicated on a false premise, a false confession. Eliot’s moral order ensures that Marner does not make this mistake, and he is eventually rewarded by a restoration of faith in human nature, and in a form of religion very different from that of his old country. Dolly insists that Eppie be brought up ‘like christened folks’s children’, taken to church, and taught her catechism: ‘the “I believe,” and everything, and “hurt nobody by word or deed”’ (p. 123). This last manifestation of faith is consonant with the Mariner’s insistence that ‘[h]e prayeth well who loveth well, / Both man and bird and

⁶² Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime*, p. 104.

⁶³ Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime*, p. 105.

beast' (ll. 645-6). Despite the reversal of narratives that ensures Marner's stability within family, community and church, and the Mariner's instability in the expectation of any life everlasting but the agonising one he is condemned to live, Eliot and Coleridge seem concordant on this point.

Eliot's repetition, in differing contexts, of her essential message that 'the same cause would produce the same effect' (p. 127) and that things can and do change, if the will is there, is accretive in effect. The effect of Coleridge's repetitions is to foreground the lack of causality in the Mariner's tale; instead of emphasising any continuity, they draw attention to its lack, and, rather than binding together, they reveal the predominating fragmentation in the narrative. Stokes suggests that one reason for this may be Coleridge's doctrinal position on sin and atonement, which he sees as being in a transitional phase in 1798; he argues that the 'divided tone' of the poem derives from 'Coleridge's difficult passage *between* Unitarianism and Anglicanism.'⁶⁴ Eliot's conception of love as a source of redemption reflects her belief in the power of sympathy to reconcile individuals to each other, to the morally correct course of action, and to themselves.

⁶⁴ Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime*, p. 95.

Conclusion: ‘the double change of self and observer’⁶⁵

Despite the lack of evidence supporting an argument for Coleridge’s direct influence on Eliot’s fiction, the accretive effect produced by the high incidence of correlative language discussed above suggests a greater affinity than has been established previously. Linguistic correspondences often foreground divergences in Coleridge and Eliot’s ideas, but these divergences are not universal. Formulations of imagination and sympathy, the ‘given’ nature of inspiration and direction, the imagery used to represent the defamiliarising effects of grief and the chaos lying beyond silence, as well as common use of biblical allusion, all point to convergences in outlook in these areas.

However, the philosophical divergences identified in this enquiry suggest something quite different. I have investigated many instances where linguistic and thematic parallels reveal radically differing meanings in their presentation. Coleridge’s preoccupation with subjective experience contrasts with Eliot’s emphasis on interaction between individuals on a material, rather than theoretical, level. The increased materiality of Eliot’s presentations, compared with Coleridge’s, characterises many of the areas discussed. Her uses of silence regulate interaction; Coleridge’s condition his isolation. Eliot’s formulation of organicism stresses the reciprocal and interdependent nature of human relationships; Coleridge’s accentuates the metaphysical dimensions of nature and individual freedom. While Coleridge believes duty to be innate, and regards it as a theoretical imperative, Eliot presents it as a practical quality, administered externally, and realised only through action.

For Coleridge, subjectivism frequently results in a passivity that guarantees his continued isolation; the agency attributed to Eliot’s characters enables their apprehension of sympathy and correct moral action. This leads to a moral cohesion in her narratives which

⁶⁵ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 88.

contrasts dramatically with the instability and fragmentation potential in all of Coleridge's meditations upon the self. The 'double change of self and observer' referred to in *Middlemarch* crystallises the contrast between Coleridge and Eliot's representations of the self in the world. Change is possible for Eliot's characters, because they interact on a material level, but for Coleridge, change must be generated through transcendence of the material world, which is not always possible within the limits of subjectivity.

Yet, even in the context of these striking contrasts, remarkable analogies persist. Here is Coleridge's description of one of his periodic bouts of despair:

The Poet is dead in me – my imagination (or rather the Somewhat that had been imaginative) lies, like a Cold Snuff on the circular Rim of a Brass Candle-stick, without even a stink of Tallow to remind you that it was once clothed & mitred with Flame.⁶⁶

Compare his use of imagery with Eliot's celebrated description of 'egoism' in *Middlemarch*:

Your pier-glass [...] will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles around that little sun (p. 248).

There is little possibility – and no evidence – of Eliot having read Coleridge's letters, yet the similarity in their choice of imagery points to shared perceptions of the nature of self. This example also characterises their differences: Coleridge is talking about himself, and Eliot is critiquing the nature of egoism. Although direct influence is not demonstrable, some kind of transition, if not transmission, of ideas can be inferred from such congruent imagery. I have not done justice in this study to the richness and complexity of Eliot's fiction, or the beauty and resonance of Coleridge's poetry – that has not been my aim – but I hope I have

⁶⁶ Coleridge, letter to William Godwin, March 1801, in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1956-71), vol. 2, p. 714.

made more manifest the possibility of those 'suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts'.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 181.

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APPENDIX 1

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from 'Frost at Midnight':

1.
[...] a companionable form,
With which I can hold commune. Idle thought! 20
But still the living spirit in our frame,
That loves not to behold a lifeless thing [...] (Version 1, 1798)

2.
[...] a companionable form,
With which I can commune: haply hence, 20
That still the living spirit in our frame,
Which loves not to behold a lifeless thing [...] (Version 3, Poetical Register, 1808-9)

3.
[...] a companionable form,
To which the living spirit in our frame, 20
That loves not to behold a lifeless thing,
Transfuses its own pleasure, its own will. (Version 6, 1817)⁶⁸

4.
[...] the thin blue flame
Lies on my low burnt fire, and quivers not;
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit 20
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought. (Version 10, 1829)⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Versions 1, 2, and 3 of these lines: Jack Stillinger, *Coleridge & Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 52-8 and 154-7, ll.

⁶⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (London: Penguin (Penguin Classics), 1997), pp. 231-3, ll. 13-23.